

breast and the film screen, of which the scale of the screen to the viewer is, perhaps, the most obvious. In his book *Film and the Dream Screen*, Robert T. Eberwein suggests several further analogies, ranging from the relationship between opticality and orality in the infant (sucking motions signal the advent of REM sleep), to a discussion of Julia Kristeva's contention that the breast, being a focal point, becomes a "there," an initiation into space.³ Even at this point it is not an "outside" space but—to borrow D. W. Winnicott's term—a "potential space":⁴ a space the infant cannot separate from itself. In this scenario the breast is an illusion, something the baby creates out of itself for its own needs. How like the film experience, where we see the film action as some necessary projection of ourselves.

Developing her discussion of the breast as primary object, Klein explains how the breast, once experienced as an other, becomes split into a good (gratifying) breast and bad (frustrating) breast. She argues that this consciousness of the breast as other arises from envy of the breast's ability to give, which is proven by its capacity to withhold. The infant then projects this envy, or desire to take in and control the breast, onto the breast itself—which becomes a devouring, controlling, critical breast.⁵ This notion of the critical breast could also be applied to the film experience. A film that "gives," that absorbs and gratifies us, is a "good" one. A film that denies or frustrates us, leaves us self-conscious, and refuses to absorb us, is a "bad" one.

Looked at in this way, it is easy to see how someone like Adorno could interpret mass culture as negatively regressive in that it "infantilizes" the audience. He writes, "The tone adopted by every film is that of the witch handing food to the child she wants to enchant or devour, while mumbling horribly: 'lovely, lovely soup. How you're going to enjoy it,'" and he concludes that "the culture industry not so much adapts to the reactions of its customers as it counterfeits them."⁶ Here Adorno adopts the role of "adult" critic—one who refuses to be absorbed. This is also the role of avant-garde cinema and the "art film," where disruption techniques and alienation devices are applied to standard filmic language to expose its seductive and devouring nature.

What interests me, in particular, is how a certain theme can have the same disconcerting effect as deconstructive film techniques, even when this theme is packaged according to the most normalizing Hollywood conventions. Infantilism, it seems to me, is one such theme. Ted Post's *The Baby* (1973) is a profoundly disturbing, I would even say radical, film largely because it does not allow viewers to immerse themselves in it in any simple sense. On the surface, infantilism might be the *perfect* subject for a Hollywood film—as understood by Adorno, at least—precisely because